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ABSTRACT

There is a general consensus that international students are a high-risk group who have a far greater number of psychological problems than their counterpart U.S. students. International students experience a number of problems due to the massive adjustments they are required to make abruptly in their social and academic lives. A review of the literature relating to the psychological problems of international students suggests a variety of difficulties ranging from loneliness, homesickness, and irritability to severe depression, confusion, and disorientation. This study examined the psychological needs of international college students and university students as related to acculturative stress. International students (N=128) completed the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students. The results indicated that the students were psychologically at-risk on several dimensions, with the analysis revealing factors labeled perceived deprivation/alienation, loneliness/homesickness, hate, fear, stress due to change, and guilt. The findings have implications for college and university counselors. (NB)

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An Assessment of Psychological Needs of International Students: Implications for Counseling and Psychotherapy

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Running Head : Psychological Needs of International Students

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Abstract

This empirical study examined the psychological needs of international college and university students as related to acculturative stress. One hundred twenty eight students, 76 males age (X= 23.6) and 52 females age (X= 22.8) participated in this study. The Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students, developed by these authors, found these students psychologically at-risk on several dimensions. Implications for counseling and psychotherapy are discussed for college and university counselors.

An Examination of Psychological Needs of International Students: Implications for Counseling and Psychotherapy

The tradition of going abroad to seek knowledge, fulfil curiosities, and tackle new adventures dates back to the ancient history. The pursuit of learning beyond indigenous boundaries seems to be as old as learning itself (Bois, 1956; Fasheh, 1984). In recent times, United States of America, the superpower and the world center of information about the most advanced technology and sophisticated knowledge in mostly all areas of human interests, has become the Mecca, a cynosure for foreign students. As a result, more foreign students are enrolled in the U.S. colleges and universities than in any other country (Anderson & Myer, 1985 ; Schram and Lauver, 1988).

According to Zikopoulos (1991), 407, 529 undergraduate and graduate students from 193 different countries were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities during the fall of 1990-1991. By all indicators, it appears that the number of international students will be growing more and more in the future, especially when U.S. institutions with declining enrollments are actively recruiting students as far as from Hong Kong and many oil-producing rich countries in the Middle East. Pedersen (1989) points out that U.S. colleges and universities are also becoming increasingly dependent on the foreign students in areas of sciences.

The presence of these students on our university campuses provides a great opportunity to promote cultural and international understanding. It is hoped that in addition to the achievement of their personal goals, these "cultural ambassadors" will ideally play an important role to enhance international understanding and collaboration to tackle problems, such as hunger, AIDS, drug abuse, etc., which no one country can solve alone.

The courage, initiatives, ambitions, and dreams of the foreign students who leave everything behind to adventure into a far distant land several thousand miles away from their homes and families deserve unqualified admiration and praise. They are the modern day "pioneers" and "frontiers" which share the courage and bravery of the founding fathers.

Now practically speaking, the reality of being a "foreigner" hits very hard in a strange land when a person has to make massive personal, social, and environmental changes upon arrival. The seriousness and severity of emotional pain associated with migration is so real and traumatic in nature that it has been given some special names. Ward (1967) calls it " a foreign student syndrome", suffering from an extremely high levels of anxiety related problems but having no recognizable physical signs and symptoms. Zwingman (1978) calls migration experience of foreign

students as a phenomenon of "uprooting disorders " with identifiable psychological symptoms of alienation, nostalgia, depression, and sense of helplessness. Based on their clinical findings, the psychiatrists, Alexander et. al (1976) describe foreign students a population that "feels vulnerable and at risk during much of their time in the United States" (p. 83).

There is a general consensus that the international students are a high-risk group who have a far greater number of psychological problems than the their counter-part, U.S. native students (Naditch and Morrisey, 1976; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Owie, 1982; Dillard & Chisolm, 1983 ;Padilla, Alvarez & Lindholm, 1986; Schram & Lauver, 1988). Pedersen (1991) sums up for all when he states that " International students are likely to experience more problems than students in general and have access to fewer resources to help them" (p. 24). They suffer silently a myriad of problems which are unique to them due to massive adjustments they are required to make abruptly in their social and academic lives (Bochner, 1972; Spradley & Phillips, 1972 ; Day and Hajj, 1986; Pedersen, 1991).

Sources of International Students' Problems

A variety of reasons have been suggested in the counseling psychology literature that contribute to the psychological problems

of the international students. Bochner (1972) attributes these problems to four major social roles which are placed upon the international students simultaneously to meet the expectations of being a student, a foreigner, a "cultural ambassador" for native country, and still meet the personal challenges of growing up as a young adult. Vega, Kolody, & Valle (1988) point out family disruption, break from familiar socio-cultural, economic, and other support systems as the source of possible stressors which are associated with the migration experience. Pedersen (1991) concurs that " A person's self-esteem and self-image are validated by significant others, who provide emotional and social support in culturally patterned ways. Moving to a foreign culture suddenly deprives a person of these support systems" (p.12).

On the other hand, there are a number of authors (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980; Church, 1982; Padilla, Alvarez, & Lindhom, 1986; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986) who believe that the communication problems of international students are the underlying root cause of their numerous difficulties that transcend all areas of these students' academic, personal, and social lives. It seems to us that Pedersen's (1988) description of "culture shock" phenomenon is well suited to explain another source of international students'problems when he writes:

> When familiar cues are removed and strange or unfamiliar cues are substituted, as might happen to a visitor in a foreign culture, our response is likely to range from vague sense of discomfort, until we have learned the new expectations, to a profound disorientation that requires a complete reorganization of our lives. (p. 57)

Alexander et al. (1976), point out that " In addition to suffering culture shock when dealing with external matters such as differences in food, climate, language, mannerisms, and communication, these students also suffer from status change and status loss" (p. 83). This status loss occurs because most of these international students once very successful and well established in their native country, all of a sudden become vulnerable to numerous academic and social problems causing them a severe shock of inferiority.

Nature of the Problems

A review of literature relating to the psychological problems of international students suggest a large gamut of psychological difficulties ranging from simple loneliness, homesickness and irritability to sever depression, confusion, and disorientation. Dillard & Chisolm (1983) maintain that "the actual cultural context on campuses in the United States frequently generates stress, depression, frustration, fear, and finally, pessimism" (p.101). Day and Hajj (1986) agree with Zwingman (1978) about the uprooting disorder that afflicts the foreign students to cause them," disorientation, nostalgic-depressive reactions, feelings of isolation, alienation, and powerlessness" (p.353).

The dilemma of psychological problems described below (Hull, 1987, p. 307) may not be typical of all the foreign students, but Kabul

does serve as a spokesman for some who are afflicted with desperation when he wrote:

> I'm not doing anything but sitting in my room drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. None of this has any meaning. Sometimes I think I should just kill myself. My roommate thinks it is because I have no parents, no country, and no religion. The psychiatrist keeps giving me pills but they aren't helping. Why do I feel like this? What should I do? My grades are O.K. -------- (Kabul)

There is a conspicuous dearth of empirical findings about the psychological problems of the international students in the counseling psychology literature. A few empirical studies attempted to investigate the psychological concerns of the foreign students are limited in scope as most of them just focused on a very small number of pre-selected major problems. There seems to be a dire necessity to examine international students' problems in a comprehensive manner to assess their overall concerns. These authors concur with Pedersen (1991) that "Much more work needs to be done regarding measures, tests, and clinical or counseling tools which will assist counselors in their work with international students" (P. 48).

The present study aspires to fill this void by developing and field testing a new Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students(ASSIS) to attract the attention of the clinicians and researchers in this area to help international students more effectively.

Development of Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students

A number of systematic steps taken to develop this scale included:

a. Construction of statements

One hundred twenty-five Likert-type statements were constructed after a review was made of prevalent counseling psychology literature related to international students. In a pilot study, 13 international students were individually interviewed by the first author to include their subjective view points and first hand experiences. Subsequently, twelve major factors with a varying number of statements (n=125) were theoretically identified to cover acculturation difficulties of the international students. The response format ranged from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree with 3, as not sure. The first draft was reviewed by three university professors, at two different universities, familiar with multi-cultural and issues related to international students. The revised and final form of this instrument, ASSIS, incorporated all the suggestions and recommendations made by the reviewers to make statements more explicit and easy to understand.

b. Participants and Procedures

Two hundred copies of the final version of ASSIS, with instructions and answer sheets, were mailed to International Student Centers of ten randomly selected universities in the United States. Self-addressed and self-stamped envelopes were provided to facilitate the completion process. The directors of International

Students Centers and international students participating in this study were encouraged to call collect to seek further clarifications in case they had any questions. After a second follow up request, a total of 136 (68%) copies of ASSIS were received. Since eight of these copies were not fully completed, the remaining 128, 76 from males age (X=23.6) and 52 females age (X= 22.8) were used for statistical analyses. The participants of this study indicated twenty-seven different countries as their national origin, a majority of them were from Asia and Latin American countries. Since representation from some countries was too small, no international comparisons were made.

C. Statistical Observations and Procedures

The SPSSX release 3.0 for Unisys computer was used to perform correlation and factor analysis to investigate the seriousness of acculturative stress related to psychological problems of the international students who participated in this study. The method of principal components was applied to extract factors. Barlett's test of sphericity was used to test the hypothesis that the population correlation matrix is an identity matrix. The value of the test statistic for sphericity was found to be 3698.84 with the associated significance level of 0.00000. Although this test is based is on the assumption that data is a sample from a multivariate normal population, the value of the test statistic is large enough to overcome the lack of normality. Therefore, the hypothesis that the population correlation matrix is an identity

was rejected.

The anti-image correlation (the negative of the partial correlation coefficient) supported the feasibility of using factor analysis. The overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was found to be quite large 0.86369, meritorious, as defined by Kaiser (1974). In addition to the large value of the overall measure of sampling adequacy, all of the individual measures of sampling adequacy were more than .76, suggesting a strong support for the application of factor analysis for the data.

D. Statistical Results

The method of Principal Components extracted 6 factors accounting 70.6% of the total variance as shown below. The remaining seventh factor accounted just for 29.4% of the total variance. See Table 1 for details about the factors, eigenvalues, and other related data.

Insert Table 1 about here

Varimax rotation of factors revealed the following factors and their representative variables as shown below in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion of Results

Since Factor 1 captured the highest percentage of total variation (38.3%) one can conclude that perceived deprivation/ alienation is of the most concern. These findings are consistent with some previous studies. Bois's (1956) observations made about perceived discrimination almost four decades ago seem to still hold true that "probably relatively few foreign students have had personal experiences with the cruder varieties of racial discrimination. More suffer from difficulties of strangeness... sensitive students may interpret social distance as racial discrimination." (p. 47). The process of alienation is double fold. First, the natural response of foreign students during the acculturative process is to seek out other co-nationals for their primary support and not to make any special efforts to reach out Americans. On the other side, American students being complacent with their situation don't feel the need to go out of the way to socialize with the foreign students. Unfortunately both foreign and native students dwell on what Pedersen (1991) calls " superficial pleasantaries". The end result is sense of alienation which is far more severe among foreign students than others (Schram & Lauver, 1988). Three major elements of alienation, feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social estrangement as defined by Burbach (1972) are very characteristic of foreign students' perceived sense of alienation.

The second major factor was found to be loneliness which contributed 9.0 % to the total variance. This sense of loneliness is caused by homesickness, missing the significant others in the native country, and sense of being lost in the unfamiliar surroundings, and most of all due to the loss of emotional and social support. It seems to us that Siegel (1991) has captured the very essence of loneliness problem of foreign students in the words of a student from India who said: "An international student is a sapling or a tree, depending on his age, but his roots are still there in his home country" (p.75).

Third factor which contributed 7.2% to the total variance, named hate in this study, seems to be unique in the existing counseling psychology literature on international students. The participants reported strong negative feelings toward host nationals in response to their culturally biased verbal and nonverbal communications, and actual derogatory behaviors. The fourth factor, fear, contributing 6.1% to the total variance was also found unusual in the literature on foreign students. This fear seems to be related to the perceived sense of insecurity in unfamiliar surroundings, perceived sense of racial discrimination, sense of inferiority, and off and on hostile relations between foreign students' native country (e.g. Iran, Iraq, etc.) and the United States.

The fifth factor, stress due to change, is the most researched topic in the literature of foreign students (Bochner,1972,

Alexander, Workneh, Klein, & Miller, 1976; Padilla, Alvarez, & Lindhom, 1986; Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987). Most of the stress is caused by multiple pressures which are placed upon the international students because of migration to a strange land. We are in full agreement with the statement that " foreign students are a high risk group, under considerable stress, this stress is more likely to be experienced in the form of physical complaints than psychological complaints" (Alexander et.al, 1976, p.87). It may be noted, however, that in our study, variance due to this factor contributed only 3.2 percent.

Last factor, guilt, that contributed 3.1 percent to the total variance, like other two factors of hate and fear in this study, was also found to be very unique. Adjusting to other host culture meant betrayal to the native culture for many foreign students. Adopting hosting cultures' values was perceived being not sincere to their own culture by these participants. The international students seem to be in "double bind", caught in between the old values of their native culture which they cherish, and new values of the host culture, which they are pressured to adopt or adapt in order to survive.

Implications for Counseling and Psychotherapy

Based on the general review of the literature and empirical findings of our own research, the following recommendations are

made for the university foreign student directors, advisors, and counselors to help this at-risk population more effectively:

Proactive Approach In traditional delivery systems, mostly counseling services are provided upon request, in sort of a reactive way. In case of international students who are clearly expected to " adjust to massive environmental, sociological and psychological change" (Day & Hajj, 1986, p.353), it is extremely urgent that mental health professionals take a proactive approach. It is suggested that counseling services are pre-planned, well structured, and are offered on the regular basis. The sensitization or desensitization of foreign students about forthcoming problematic situations can be very useful to equip these students in advance with the necessary coping skills and practical advice. Several authors (Althen, 1983; Brislin & Pederson, 1976; Lock & Valesco, 1987) also point that prevention of problems through such methods can be lot more cost effective than handling the actual crisis through traditional "after-the-fact" techniques.

Continuous and Comprehensive Approach:

In line with the proactive approach, it is important that guidance and counseling services for international students are offered on the continuous basis, not like making one or two times contacts or orientation presentations and then forget for ever. We concur with Pedersen (1991) that " orientation is a continuous process requiring contact with students before they arrive, during they

stay, and after they have returned home, as the student experiences a continuous process of adjustment" (p.44). Moreover, to make these orientation programs effective, it is imperative that they are comprehensive in nature which must involve international students, their instructors, advisors and counselors, if possible even U.S. students (Mestenhauser, Marty, & Stelitz, 1988). The purpose of making these programs comprehensive is naturally to enhance intercultural understanding, develop social networks, and gain insight in the unique concerns and problems of international students.

Alternative Approaches

Like most of the other minorities in America, international students "do not have a history of seeking out professional counselors or openly sharing their feelings with strangers (Romero, 1981, p. 385). Since most of the international students are from underdeveloped or developing countries where such professional counseling services are not practiced or not normally available; it is likely that many international students are just not aware of the counseling services to avail themselves. Under these circumstances, it is important that the counselors take initiative to find out if a foreign student needs any help. Pedersen (1991) presents an alternative scenario of providing counseling services to foreign students:

> Counseling international students frequently occurs in an informal setting, such as hallways, home, or street corner, and frequently depends on an informal method, such as presentation, discussion, or daily encounter, which might not be perceived as counseling according to standardized models. (pp. 28-29)

The professionals working with foreign students must find alternative ways to help their clients. Traditional methods where a client might, "make appointment in advance to see the counselor in her office, readily start sharing his personal problems, pay the fees, make another appointment, and get on his way" simply does not work in case of foreign students. Above all, "our admonitions to urge international students to adjust should go one step further on our part to make conscious efforts to accommodate them through changing situations, and not so much changing them as persons" (Sandhu, in press).

Encourage Involvement Why do foreign students feel alienated? Perhaps every foreign student has a unique personal reason for that. But one main reason seems to be the under-utilization of their knowledge and skills in academic and nonacademic activities. Mestenhauser (1983) argues that with all rich resources for international education which can be used very conveniently and in a cost-effective manner, international students typically remain as learners on campuses of the most universities and colleges. The active role as teachers where they can make some unique and worthwhile contributions is mostly denied. "You are here to learn but not to teach" or indirectly "there is nothing much you've got to offer"; such unspoken messages serve not only the painful blows to the ego of the international students but also discourage their participation. It is important that some serious efforts are made to incorporate the unique contributions of these students in both

curricular and co-curricular activities.

Human Relation Training Programs and Buddy System

Differences in customs, cultures, and languages are the roadblocks to mutual understanding and friendships. There is a dire necessity of conducting cross-cultural human relations training programs to "impart sensitivity to others, reducing prejudice and inducing respect, even toward those foreign cultural values and practices that make little sense" (Brislin & Pedersen, 1976, p.5). To help foreign students combat loneliness, it is imperative that a social network is developed through a planned buddy system including both national and international students. For deeper appreciation and involvement, it would be useful to encourage the participants reach out others beyond their own co-nationals.

The underlying purpose of the human relations program is to help international students feel connected and at-home in the United States.

Empowerment through Communication Workshops

A large number of international students come from countries where English is not a spoken language. As demonstrated through passing scores on Test of English as a Second Language (TOEFL), these students do show proficiency in written and comprehension components. But these students face a tremendous number of difficulties when they have to communicate orally. Most of these difficulties are due to differences in accent, enunciations, slang, and use of special American English words. Moreover, translation and retranslation back and forth from English and native language,

also slow down the normal communication processes. The major difficulty, however, lies in the lack of these students' practice of using English in their daily lives.

It would certainly help if professors and peers of international students are sensitive to their special language needs. To facilitate communication, it would be useful if written English is used more frequently until foreign students become accustomed to the oral communication processes. For example, an instructor who is sensitive to the oral communication difficulties of the international students, may give more written class notes and assignments and make a special provision to ascertain that foreign students have understood the subject matter covered in the class.

The administrative staff working with the international students, may also consider mini-communication workshops on the campus as a part of their continuous orientation programs. In these workshops, foreign students may become familiar with the use of colloquial English, commonly used slang words, social and cultural mores of American society to communicate effectively both in the academic and non-academic world.

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TABLE 1

VARIABLE	COMMUNALITY	FACTOR	EIGENVALUE	% OF VAR	CUM %
MODM	0.69983	1	13.77960	38.3	38.3
ITDS	0.58042	2	3.24114	9.0	47.3
OBTM	0.73732	3	2.60349	7.2	54.5
IDWD	0.78948	4	2.19702	6.1	60.6
ISPT	0.73618	5	1.33285	3.7	64.3
GBMP	0.75179	6	1.15562	3.2	67.5
HMPD	0.58607	7	1.11206	3.1	70.6
IMPO	0.73349				
IPEA	0.68051				
FUAE	0.68999				
FLLR	0.83284				
HMCB	0.84402				
MPAM	0.77328				
FSUS	0.79566				
FGSP	0.75765				
HPCI	0.60677				
MTDR	0.77415				
MTDC	0.76544				
SSLB	0.72238				
FBPC	0.68355				
WAFC	0.63432				
IRPP	0.70397				
HPHN	0.80673				
HPHV	0.84493				
HPHA	0.80483				
HPUV	0.44267				
HPSV	0.57313				
HPJV	0.73110				
LBCB	0.76691				
DOBC	0.61215				
DSPS	0.63029				
NCWO	0.48414				
DTAP	0.67861				
KLPF	0.81103				
WSMC	0.68277				
CFRH	0.67339				

TABLE 2

The factors of discriminations were clearly recognized as a result of these factor analyses. The fator analysis resulted in 6 different factors as given below.

1. Deprivation/Alienation	
	Many opportunities are denied to me (MODM)
	I am treated differently in social situations (ITDS)
	Others are biased toward me (OBTM)
	I suffer from prejudice and un equal treatment (ISPT)
	I am denied what I deserve (IDWD)
	It hurts to see my people are discriminated (HMPD)
	Get mad if I am treated differently for my race (MTDR)
	Get mad if I am treated differently for my color (MTDC)
2. Loneliness	
	I feel lost leaving my relatives behind(FLLR)
	Homesickness for my country bothers me (HMCB)
	Feel sad living in these unfamiliar surroundings (FSUS)
	I miss the people and country of my origin (IMPO)
3. Hate	
	Hurts if people show hatred toward me nonverbal(HPHN)
	Hurts when people show hatred toward me verbally (HPHV)
	Hurts when people show hatred toward me by action(HPHA)
	Hurts if people are sarcastic to my cultural values(HPSV)
	Hurts if people Joke about my cultural values(HPJV)
4. Fear	
	I worry for my safety because of my culture (WSMC)
	Will keep low profile for fear of others (KLPF)
	Discouraged to try anything ..... (DTAP)
	I have to relocate from place to place (IRPP)
5. Stress Due To Change	
	Feel uncomfortable to adjust to new eating habits(FUAE)
	Multiple pressures are put on me after migration (MPAM)
	Feel I betray my people when I adopt new culture (FBPC)
6. Guilt	
	Feel guilty because I am better off than my people(GBMP)
	Makes me feel guilty for not being sincere person(FGSP)

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